

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1183

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEDELLIN 0290

E.O. 11652: XGDS1

TAGS: PINT, PINS, CO

SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES REACT IN FACE OF UNPRECEDENTED WAVE  
OF KIDNAPPINGS IN MEDELLIN

REF: (A) MED 0281; (B) MED 0287

SUMMARY: EPIDEMIC OF KIDNAPPINGS IN CITY OF MEDELLIN AND INABILITY OF SECURITY FORCES TO APPREHEND PERPETRATORS HAS CREATED CLIMATE OF ACUTE UNEASE AND PROVOKED PUBLIC OUTCRY FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT MEASURES. AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND MINDEFENSE) HAVE RESPONDED WITH SERIES OF COMMUNIQUEES, ORGANIZATIONAL MEASURES AND SHOW OF FORCE, EFFECTIVENESS OF WHICH IN REESTABLISHING BADLY SHAKEN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE STILL UNCERTAIN. END SUMMARY.

1. FIVE KIDNAPPINGS DURING SEVEN-DAY PERIOD, OCT. 18-24, AND TWELVE SINCE AUGUST, HAVE CREATED CLIMATE OF ACUTE UNEASE (SOME WOULD SAY PANIC) ON EVE OF 300TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS IN CITY OF MEDELLIN. LATEST VICTIMS INCLUDE 75 YEAR-OLD WOMAN, TWO CHILDREN (AGED 12 AND 15) SEIZED WHILE AWAITING SCHOOL BUSES, SWISS-NATIONAL AND WEALTHY MERCHANT. KIDNAPPINGS AND MORE NUMEROUS THREATS OF SAME HAVE PROVOKED STRIDENT DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION FROM RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS. AMONG MOST NOTABLE HAVE BEEN: (A) REQUEST  
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BY PRESTIGIOUS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE THAT CITY'S ANNIVERSARY

CELEBRATIONS BE POSTPONED (OCT. 22); (B) COLOMBIAN SENATE RESOLUTION (OCT. 22) CALLING FOR STERN MEASURES; (C) EDITORIAL IN CONSERVATIVE DAILY "EL COLOMBIANO" DECRYING CITY'S PLIGHT AND TERMING NOV. 2 AS MORE APPROPRIATELY ALL SOUL'S DAY (CATHOLIC HOLIDAY HONORING DEAD) THAN DATE FOR MEDELLIN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION; (D) PROTEST FROM CATTLE BREEDERS' FEDERATION, WHICH BROUGHT RESPONSE FROM PRESIDENT LOPEZ (SEE PARA. 2); (E) SIMILAR MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT FROM MEDELLIN WOMEN'S GROUPS, TERMING INSECURITY "PUBLIC CALAMITY" AND CALLING ON MOTHERS TO KEEP CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL; AND (F) STINGING SERMON BY ARCHBISHOP FROM CATHEDRAL PULPIT, OCT. 26, CHARGING THAT 300TH ANNIVERSARY "OVERSHADOWED BY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE IMMORALITY AND AVALANCHE OF TRULY SPINE-CHILLING BLOODSHED AND TERROR."

2. AUTHORITIES AT NATIONAL, DEPARTMENTAL, AND MUNICIPAL LEVEL HAVE REACTED WITH SERIES OF STATEMENTS AND MEASURES TO ATTEMPT RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, IN OCT. 25 REPLY TO CATTLE BREEDERS' FEDERATION, DEFENDED GOVERNMENT'S RECORD, PROMISED (UNDEFINED) ACTIONS TO UPGRADE CITY'S SECURITY, AND NOTED THAT KIDNAPPINGS OCCUR DAILY, AND OFTEN REMAIN UNSOLVED FOR LENGTHY PERIODS, EVEN IN MORE ADVANCED COUNTRIES (CITING U.S. AND HEARST CASE). MINISTER OF DEFENSE VARON VALENCIA PROMISED POLICE REINFORCEMENTS. GOVERNOR OF ANTIOQUIA, MONTOYA Y MONTOYA, ANNOUNCED "SUMMIT SECURITY MEETING" IN MEDELLIN, PROBABLY OCT. 30, TO INCLUDE FOUR GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND CARDINAL. HE ALSO ESTABLISHED COMMITTEE OF CIVIC EMERGENCY, COMPOSED OF AREA'S TOP SECURITY OFFICIALS AND MOST EMINENT CITIZENS, TO PROMOTE COLLABORATION BETWEEN CITIZENRY AND AUTHORITIES, AND TO COORDINATE ANTI-VIOLENCE EFFORTS ON ALL LEVELS. FOURTH BRIGADE INITIATED PATROLLING OF CITY BY SEVERAL THOUSAND CAMOUFLAGE-UNIFORMED TROOPS, OCT. 25 AND, ACCORDING CHIEF OF STAFF MEJIA, CURRENTLY PROVIDING PERSONAL GUARDS TO MORE THAN 100 PERSONS UNDER THREAT OF KIDNAPPING. MEANWHILE, GOVERNOR AND MAYOR ISSUED SEPARATE COMMUNIQUE CALLING FOR UNITY AND COLLECTIVE DEFENSE IN

STRUGGLE AGAINST CRIMINALS, AND RAISING REWARD FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO FREEING OF KIDNAP VICTIMS TO ONE MILLION PESOS (APPROX. US \$31,000).

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3. COMMENT. IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS, BOTH MINDEFENSE VARON VALENCIA AND ANTIOQUIA GOVERNOR HAVE ALLEGED THAT URBAN GUERRILLA NETWORKS, AS WELL AS CRIMINAL ELEMENTS, INVOLVED IN KIDNAPPINGS. FOURTH BRIGADE COMMANDER MONTANEZ MADE SIMILAR STATEMENT IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION REPORTED REF A, AND GOVERNOR CONFIDED, DURING LUNCHEON OCT. 24, THAT HE HOPED INTERROGATIONS OF 25 PERSONS NOW HELD IN CONNECTION

KIDNAPPINGS WOULD FURTHER CLARIFY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TWO GROUPS. BOTH AUTHORITIES ADMITTED THAT KIDNAPPERS POSSESS EXCELLENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION REGARDING TARGETS' FAMILIES AND FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES, AND ALSO RE POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND MOVEMENTS. ALSO INDICATED THAT GUERRILLA/CRIMINAL ELEMENTS PROBABLY HAVE INFILTRATED NOT ONLY MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND BANKS, BUT NATIONAL POLICE AND DAS AS WELL. AGAIN, BOTH INDICATED (AS REPORTED REF B) THAT CRUCIAL PROBLEM IS NOT VEHICLES OR MEN, BUT RESTORING CONFIDENCE IN AND CREDIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES.

4. THIS CLIMATE OF UNEASE AND LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN AUTHORITIES AT ALL LEVELS WHICH PREVAILS TODAY IN ANTIOQUIA DOES NOT STEM WHOLLY FROM KIDNAPPING EPIDEMIC, NOR IS IT LIKELY TO DISAPPEAR EVEN IF MAJOR SUCCESS IS SCORED AGAINST CRIMINAL ELEMENTS. ANTIOQUIAN OPINION IS, OF COURSE, HIGHLY EMOTIVE, AND HAS EXPERIENCED RAPID SWINGS IN RECENT PAST. HOWEVER, AT PRESENT, THERE IS ALSO DEEP PESSIMISM CONCERNING RANGE OF GOV'T. POLICIES, PARTICULARLY IN ECONOMIC FIELD. PRIVATE OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY SUCH INDIVIDUALS AS LUIS F. ECHAVARRIA VELEZ (FORMER MINHACIENDA AND CURRENT PRESIDENT OF ANDI JUNTA) CONTRAST SHARPLY WITH THEIR PUBLIC ONES AND ARE STRIDENTLY CRITICAL OF GOV'T. INACTION IN COMBATTING UNEMPLOYMENT AND LAGGING INVESTMENT AND IN CURBING "COMMUNIST INFILTRATION", PARTICULARLY IN MINLABOR, AND CORRUPTION. THERE IS CONCERN RE CHAOTIC UNIVERSITY SITUATION AND WITH SUCH ACTS AS UNIVERSITY OF ANTIOQUIA STUDENT COMMUNIQUE APPLAUDING ASSASSINATION OF GRAL. RINCON QUINONES. FINALLY, THERE IS WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT ANTIOQUIA, IF NOT COLOMBIA, IS IN FOR LENGTHY AND DIFFICULT PERIOD OF URBAN UNREST AND INSECURITY.

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